Published: May 25, 2016, *Kokomo Tribune* [Page: A4]

http://www.kokomotribune.com/indianakokomo/house-of-burgess-texas-gop-needs-punctuation/article_3b0d3b70-21cb-11e6-b7d8-97d4d9be6afc.html

KT photo | **Tim Bath**

House of Burgess: Texas GOP needs punctuation

Party platform accidentally endorses homosexuality

By Rob Burgess
Tribune columnist

As the old adage goes, a well-placed comma can mean the difference between “Let’s eat, Grandma”, and, “Let’s eat Grandma.”

The Texas Republican Party found this out the hard way earlier this month. Under the heading, “Homosexuality,” its recently adopted 2016 party platform contained a sentence badly in need of some copy editing.

“Homosexuality is a chosen behavior that is contrary to the fundamental unchanging truths that has been ordained by God in the Bible, recognized by our nations founders, and shared by the majority of Texans,” it reads.

Rudy Oeftering, vice president of the LGBT Republican group Metroplex Republicans, brought the inherent linguistic issues to light when he contacted John Wright of The New Civil Rights Movement on May 18. In effect, the passage as written seems to indicate “the founders and the majority of Texans are gay,” according to Oeftering.

“Needless to say, it’s a poorly written sentence in general,” wrote Wright. “Either ‘truths’ should be singular or ‘has’ should be ‘have,’ and ‘nations’ lacks a possessive apostrophe.”

This is an unfortunate error for the state party, but it’s one it has apparently avoided in the past. “The Texas GOP did not immediately return our request for comment,” reported National Public Radio’s Eyder Peralta on Thursday. “The 2014 version of its platform has the verbs all correct.”

This isn’t the first time state Republicans have mangled the English language in their quest to deny civil rights to LGBT Texans. In 2009, current Texas Gov. Greg Abbott was running for re-election for attorney general against Democratic Houston lawyer Barbara Ann Radnofsky. His opponent highlighted a very unfortunate wording choice in a previously passed legal change.

“Radnofsky ... says that a 22-word clause in a 2005 constitutional amendment designed to ban gay marriages erroneously endangers the legal status of all marriages in the state,” reported Dave Montgomery of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram Nov. 18, 2009. “The amendment, approved by the Legislature and overwhelmingly ratified by voters, declares that ‘marriage in this state shall consist only of the union of one man and one woman.’ But the troublemaking phrase, as Radnofsky sees it, is Subsection B, which declares: ‘This state or a political subdivision of this state may not create or recognize any legal status identical or similar to marriage.’”

Oops.

As I wrote in my June 18, 2014 column, “Texas GOP needs therapy,” the party approved a platform addendum endorsing so-called reparative therapy at the 2014 Republican State Convention. This wording remains in the current 2016 draft. While a handful of states now outlaw the practice, a federal ban is making its way through Capitol Hill.

“A companion bill to the House’s Therapeutic Fraud Prevention Act [H.R. 2450] — an effort to ban LGBT ‘conversion therapy’ introduced last year by Rep. Ted Lieu (D-California) — was introduced in the Senate,” reported The Advocate’s Neal Broverman April 28. “Sens. Cory Booker (D-New Jersey) and Patty Murray (D-Washington) are behind the Senate’s version. If passed into law, the bill would consider all efforts to change someone’s sexual

orientation or gender identity an ‘unfair or deceptive act or practice’ under the Federal Trade Commission Act.”

Actually, I’ve changed my mind. Until the federal government makes more of an effort to protect LGBT civil rights, we could need state organizations like the Texas GOP to make even more grammatical mistakes. They might accidentally help us all make some progress.

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